

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Lavina State Bank

other name/site number: Bank of Lavina, Lavina Post Office; Lavina Temple Lodge #101; 24GV0166

2. Location

street & number: 101 Main Street

not for publication: na

city/town: Lavina

vicinity: na

state: Montana code: MT county: Golden Valley code: 037 zip code: 59046

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency or bureau

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

 entered in the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 determined eligible for the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 removed from the National Register

 see continuation sheet

 other (explain):

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:	Private	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
Category of Property:	Building	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> building(s)
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:	na	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
		<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
Name of related multiple property listing:	na	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

COMMERCE/FINANCIAL/bank

GOVERNMENT/post office

SOCIAL/meeting hall

Current Functions:

SOCIAL/meeting hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

OTHER/Western Commercial

Materials:

foundation: n/a

walls: BRICK

roof: ASPHALT

other: BRICK (chimney)

Narrative Description

Lavina, Montana is located in the eastern section of Golden Valley County, an area of Montana called the Western Sedimentary Plains. The region is characterized by rolling and rough grasslands watered by intermittent streams, the most substantial of which is the Musselshell River. Precipitation averages 12-14 inches annually, and only about 5 percent of the county is woodland. Predominant vegetation in the region consists of a variety of native grasses and shrubs, especially silver sagebrush, and domestic crops such as wheat, rye, and hay.¹

The Lavina State Bank/Lavina Masonic Lodge is a two-story wood frame building located on the corner of Main Street and First Avenue at the south end of the town's historic commercial area. The rectangular building rests on a concrete foundation. Narrow clapboard, highlighted by cornerboards and milled trims, covers the exterior walls. The wood-frame windows feature fixed and double-hung styles, and the doors are vintage. The shed roof slopes down gently to the west.

Restoration Efforts

Until recently, the historic appearance of the building was buried beneath vinyl siding and masonite. In 2003, using historic photographs and as much of the original material as possible, the Masons of the Lavina Lodge began the restoration of the building.

The fixtures, layout and design of the building and lodge began to make bigger steps when Raymond Barry became the Lodge's Hiram Abiff. In the summer of 2003, Brother Barry quietly began to redecorate the upstairs, adding green and beige tile work around the altar, upholstering benches and covering the altar with brilliant blue, and installing lighting fixtures to the stairwell and over the back entrance. He also purchased gothic thrones for both Senior and Junior Wardens. Barry provided a green empire sofa for the anteroom at a later date.

(see continuation sheet)

¹ Montana Agricultural Experiment Station, *Vegetative Rangeland Types in Montana*, (Montana State University, Bozeman, 1976) pp. 8-9; Soil Conservation Service, *Climax Vegetation of Montana, Based on Soils and Climate*, (United States Department of Agriculture, Bozeman, MT, 1976) pp. 18-23, 51, 57.

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In the fall after contact with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Brothers Barry and Steve Tyrell peeled off the old vinyl siding. In the spring of 2004, Brothers Barry and Robert McNary finished removing the plastic as well as the Masonite siding which exposed the sites of the original windows. Thereafter, Masonic crews, particularly Bob Sasse, Bill Lehfeldt, and Irwin Allen, procured wood clapboard siding the matched the original material. By the summer of 2004, framing of windows and re-siding began. Brothers Barry, McNary, and Francis Rose did much of the honors.

Brother Hal Ostlund was responsible for final installation of windows provided by Brother Danny Smith and his wife, Marilyn. In the fall, Brother Tyrell began the process of power washing the siding and Brother McNary put on a primer coat over the "new" siding.

Major interior renovations began over the summer of 2004 when Brother Barry ripped out the lowered ceiling structures. By late fall, Brothers McNary and Steve Fraser took to brushing the exposed tin ceiling and painting it beige. A frieze border to the ceiling followed by Barry and Fraser. McNary painted it gold, Barry placed Presidential Prints supplied by Rose on alternating tile rectangles. Joan Krause cut them to fit.

Brother Barry purchased and installed four gasoliers to light the renewing front parlor. He pulled out yards and yards of gold damask fabric, which he had carried around the country for 20 years, out of storage and upholstered the walls. Barry also purchased a long teller cage to cover the back wall of the parlor. He also procured interior trim that closely matched the original, which had been removed after the historic period. These were installed appropriately by Barry, Rose, and Fraser. Not long after, Barry stripped the modern flooring to reveal the original hardwood floor. Wood stoves from the Dan Olson family and Joan Krause took their stations in back and front rooms. The original post office safe remains in the building and on display.

In the winter of 2005, renovation of the back room began and was completed fairly quickly. After Barry cleared the premises, McNary completed the paint job. Barry and Rose built the new postal front around a cage saved for years by Postmasters Minnie Krause and Kim Grammens, who also provided postal memorabilia, leather mail bags, and a giant Lavina Post Office sign. The postal frame was constructed using bead board. Display cases in the postal room were donated by Brother John Dougherty. Mirrors and picture frames have been provided by Raymond Barry. A number of prints were donated or procured for the Lavina Lodge by Brother Rose.

Exterior

As a result of this restoration effort, the building once again displays its historic appearance. The two-story wood-frame building features narrow clapboard siding, painted a creamy tan, with darker tan cornerboards, trim, and sahes. Its shed roof slopes gently from the front (east) elevation to the rear (west). A narrow milled cornice circles the building at the roofline. A tall, narrow brick chimney pierces the roof near the southeast corner. In 1938, a two-story shed addition extended the building to the west.

The Bank's east elevation features a vintage, wood entry door on its north side. The door contains a single, long plate glass window. Above the door is a large, nearly square transom filled with a single fixed light. Two shallow concrete steps lead from the sidewalk to the door. Centered on the south side of the first story is a large display window, featuring a single plate glass fixed sash below a fixed one-light transom. The Masonic Lodge members recently painted the words "BANK OF LAVINA" in gold lettering with black highlights across the lower pane of glass. The second story of the east elevation contains two evenly-spaced one-over-one double-hung windows.

The north elevation faces First Avenue, and is divided by a vertical narrow member into a long east bay and a smaller west bay of the 1938 addition. The first story features a secondary entrance at its west end. Much like the east elevation entry, the door is vintage wood with one large light within and a large transom opening above. The transom is infilled with wood. East of the entry, and within the west bay, is a window opening that contains a single one-light fixed sash below an infilled

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sash. The upper sash contains a sign that reads LAVINA-TEMPLE LODGE 110 AF-AM. Another window is located at the east end of the north elevation. This window is similar to that on the east elevation's first story, containing a large fixed, one-light display sash below a large transom. "BANK OF LAVINA" is painted on the lower sash in gold lettering with black highlights. There are three one-over-one double-hung windows at the second story. Two are evenly spaced across the east bay of the elevation, and the other is off-center in the west bay. Historically, a door, accessed by a wood-frame staircase, provided additional entry to the second story of the building at the west end of the east bay. Clapboard currently covers the opening, and a modern wooden balcony is in the place of the original stair landing.

The south elevation overlooks a small grassy yard. Fenestration on this exterior wall is limited to five windows: two at the first story and three at the second story. Like the north elevation, a narrow vertical member defines the 1908 building and the 1938 addition. There is a single one-light, smaller, fixed, wood-frame off center in the south side of the first story, and a one-over-one double-hung window at the west side. Two one-over-one double-hungs are evenly spaced across the east bay's second story, and there is single window of the same style centered in the west bay.

The west (rear) elevation has no fenestration.

Integrity:

The Lavina State Bank building retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. Though much of its original exterior siding and fenestration material was removed after the historic period, suitable wood clapboard matching the original, together with vintage windows and doors of the same dimensions, materials, and style, have restored the building's historic appearance.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a
Significant Person(s): n/a
Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Areas of Significance: COMMERCE; COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT; ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1908-1960

Significant Dates: 1908, 1911, 1923, 1938, 1960

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

One of the earliest buildings erected in new Lavina, the Lavina State Bank building is representative of local commercial growth that followed the arrival of the Milwaukee Road in Central Montana, and the ensuing homestead boom. During the homestead era, Lavina served as the social and commercial center for the region's agricultural population. The Bank of Lavina, chartered as the Lavina State Bank in 1911, served as the financial center of the town and surrounding communities. Established in 1908 by Lavina's two most prominent businessmen, Daniel Slayton and Louis Lehfeldt, the bank is representative of early community development. Though Lavina State Bank was one of hundreds of Montana banks to fail during the early 1920s, the building continued to serve the Lavina community as a post office, and after 1938, as the Lavina Masonic Lodge as well. The building is an important local representation of the development of commerce during the homestead "boom" of the 1910s, and the devastations of drought and depression in the early 1920s. It gains additional significance as a community hub in its incarnations as the local post office and Masonic Hall. For these reasons it is eligible for listing under criterion A.

Native American Use and Euro-American Exploration of the Lavina Area

In the centuries prior to permanent Euro-American settlement of the project area, central Montana was home to several American Indian nations, including the Blackfeet, Crow and Sioux tribes. These three tribes used the region most frequently, but groups of Flatheads, Gros Ventre, Metis, Nez Perce, Northern Cheyenne, and Shoshone also made occasional forays into central Montana on hunting expeditions.² The Blackfeet used the river bottoms and foothills in their territory for winter campgrounds, where there was shelter from winter storms and firewood was available. When the grass began to green and the buffalo began to form large herds during early spring, the Blackfeet would begin to move onto the plains, using experience, tradition, and information from neighbors to chart their course to collect berries and hunt for elk and buffalo. The River Crow also lived in the lands north of the Yellowstone, and claimed much of what is now Central Montana as their territory. Through the late 1700s and the mid 1800s, territorial conflict between these two powerful nations often erupted in the Musselshell Valley.

Shortly after the Lewis and Clark expedition traveled through the Missouri River country north of Lavina, American fur companies turned an eye to the upper Missouri and its tributaries. In 1809, a party of 150 men working for the St. Louis-based Missouri Fur Company began plying the streams of central Montana for beaver and other fur-bearing animals. In the course of their travels they probably worked the banks of the Musselshell River in what would become Golden Valley County. Although its trapping efforts proved successful the party faced violent opposition from the Blackfeet and their allies, and in subsequent decades trapping along the upper Missouri and its tributaries consisted of infrequent expeditions by small groups of men.

(see continuation sheet)

² Montana State Engineer's Office, Water Resources Survey, Golden Valley County, Montana, Part 1, History of Land and Water Use On Irrigated Areas, (State Engineer's Office, Helena, MT, 1949) p. 6; Harold Joseph Stearns, "A History of the Upper Musselshell Valley to 1920," (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 1966) p. 6.

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Sustained, large-scale trapping by Euro-Americans in the region would not reappear until the 1830s-1840s with the establishment of a series of trading posts in Blackfeet territory. The last and most enduring of these posts was Fort Benton, founded in 1846.³ In subsequent decades, Fort Benton would prove to be important to the development of central Montana, as it grew into a trade center that influenced the growth of communities throughout the surrounding region. For the time being, however, most of central Montana remained undeveloped by non-Indians. After the Treaty of 1851, the US government recognized the area as part of the Blackfeet nation.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, private parties and various arms of the federal government sponsored exploratory expeditions into the many unsettled areas of the West. Among the ventures undertaken in this period was Ferdinand Hayden's geological survey of the area between the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers in 1854-1856. Hayden's expedition, funded in part by the Chouteau family of Fort Benton, passed through the Golden Valley County area.⁴ In doing so, it made history by becoming the first recorded group of Euro-Americans in the Lavina region.

Regional Mining, Transportation, and the Beginning of Agriculture Give Birth to Old Lavina

Shortly after Hayden's expedition, gold discoveries began drawing miners and merchants to the mountain valleys of western Montana. The mining camps spawned trade and travel corridors in all directions, for the isolated settlements depended on imports from both coasts and food stuffs from the fertile bottom lands of the broader valleys in the region. Fort Benton, located about 150 miles northwest of what would become Lavina, served as a major supply center for the western mine settlements. The booming trade town stimulated activity in surrounding regions, and by the late 1870s several men were grazing cattle herds along Swimming Woman Creek in the northwest corner of what would become Golden Valley County.⁵

Other cattle operations quickly followed on the heels of these early stockmen. In 1880 the "79" outfit, a large livestock venture, set up headquarters in Big Coulee southwest of Lavina. From its Big Coulee base, the enormous ranch was soon running thousands of cattle, sheep, and horses tended by some 100 employees.⁶ In 1881, cowboys from the "79" joined employees from other ranches in the Lavina region's first roundup. Stockmen started gathering the herds at the lower and upper reaches of the Musselshell River and its tributaries, and ultimately met on the banks of the river near what would shortly become the first Lavina townsite. In doing so they began a practice that would endure for decades, as Lavina became the endpoint for the area's annual fall and spring roundups.⁷

As the central Montana range filled with cattle, the Northern Pacific railroad pushed westward across the Northern Plains. The rails reached Billings in August of 1882. The preceding spring, T. C. Power, a Fort Benton businessman, watched the progress of the track laying crews and envisioned a stage line connecting the growing soon-to-be rail town of Billings with Fort Benton. In May of 1882, Power founded the Billings-Benton Stage Company. He immediately dispatched construction crews under the command of Walter Burke to build trail over the 220 miles that separated the two towns. Burke was charged with the task of completing the road, erecting 17 stage stations, and stocking the line in less than six weeks. Completion of the road entailed finding a suitable passage not only over land but also across several streams that ran through the route, the most substantial of which was the Musselshell River. Burke assessed possible crossings of the river and settled on a ford about a mile upstream from the present town of Lavina. He erected "a stage stables, mess house,

³ Malone and Roeder, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, (University of Washington Press, Seattle.1976) pp. 38-46.

⁴ William Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and Scientist in the Winning of the American West*, (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 1966) pp. 489-492; Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 6.

⁵ Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 6.

⁶ Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 6; Gordon et al. 1971:6-9

⁷ Bicentennial Committee 1976: 13

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bunk house for the men to sleep in, and ... [a] saloon" and named the settlement Lavina in homage to his former sweetheart.⁸ That summer the Musselshell Valley "settled up thick," and the stage stop became the hub of activity. It was soon surrounded by the home ranches of several big cattle outfits, the closest of which was the Three V Cattle Company, which established its headquarters a quarter mile west of present-day Lavina. By the following year, the settlement offered daily stage service to Billings and bi-weekly stages east to Roundup and north to Lewistown, by then a bustling burg of over 1,000 people.⁹

Shortly after it initiated service, the stage line constructed a log bridge at the Lavina river crossing to ease the passage of its coaches. The bridge, however, proved insufficient, for the violent spring floods on the Musselshell washed it out annually. In 1885, the stage company replaced it with a steel structure. An increase in traffic followed the completion of the new bridge, which was the only steel bridge on the Musselshell and made the crossing passable year round. Lavina was thereafter "on one of the most important wagon roads of the state." The small settlement prospered with the trade from "freighters carry[ing] anything from flour, bacon, calomel, Lydia Pinkhams, overalls, calico dress goods, bonnets, guns and ammunition, to whiskey and mouth organs," and with the business generated by the surrounding stock operations.¹⁰

Over the next twenty years empty ranges in the region slowly disappeared as stock outfits moved more herds into the Musselshell country. As a trade and transportation hub for the area, Old Lavina, as it came to be known, grew apace. With the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railway Company's decision to build its main line along the Musselshell in the first decade of the twentieth century, the future of the town seemed secure. But railroad surveyors, perhaps in response to landowner resistance at the old townsite, located the train station a mile downstream from Old Lavina. In 1906-1907 the old town enjoyed a last burst of activity as grading and track laying crews passed through the river valley. A Missouri firm held the grading contract, and used African-American grading crews to run the graders that were pulled by 600 horses and mules. The crews camped for a time just across the river from the present townsite. They continued to contribute to Old Lavina's last business boom after the camp moved on, for the transport of camp supplies translated into a flurry of freight traffic.¹¹

Completion of the Milwaukee Road and Construction of New Lavina

Louis Lehfeldt completed a two-story, twenty-two room hotel, called The Adams, in 1908, just as trains began serving the town. By the fall of 1908, several other businesses had joined The Adams in serving new Lavina, including Slayton's Mercantile, a livery stable, a land office, and a bank. Other commercial establishments followed, and Lavina soon offered every service central Montanans might need. In short order, the town boasted a second hotel (called a different times The Adams Annex, the Radford, and the Hotel Clermont), a lumber company, a barber, a dentist, a restaurant, a saloon, a druggist, a butcher, a jeweler, a milliner, an attorney, a piano tuner, a blacksmith, a harness shop, two garages, a newspaper, three grain elevators, and various other skilled tradesmen.¹² Lehfeldt and Slayton joined forces to establish the Bank of Lavina. In 1911 their bank was chartered as the Lavina State Bank.

The ranks of the surrounding populace swelled with the town itself. Homesteaders poured into the Musselshell country in immigrant cars that moved over the new Milwaukee rail line. Even before the rail reached Lavina, the Milwaukee set about promoting the region. The railroad company established an experimental dry farm near Lavina, and employed Dr. W.X.

⁸ Bicentennial Committee 1976: 11-13

⁹ Bicentennial Committee, *Bicentennial, Golden Valley County, Heritage '76*, (Roundup Record Tribune, Roundup, Montana, 1976) p. 13; Albie Gordon, Margaret Lehfeldt, and Mary Morsanny, *Dawn in Golden Valley, A County in Montana*, (No publication information, available at Montana Historical Society Research Center, Helena. 1971) p. 136.

¹⁰ Bicentennial Committee 1976, pp. 13, 16; Gordon et al. 1971, p. 136.

¹¹ Bicentennial Committee 1976, p. 16; Gordon et al. 1971, pp. 136, 155, 160.

¹² Gordon et al. 1971, p. 136.

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Suddeth to farm the property and to publicize his successes. The Milwaukee experimental farm placed Lavina at the forefront of agricultural development in the Musselshell Valley. Word of the region's "fine future" spread rapidly. In a single week in the spring of 1910, ten carloads of immigrants detrained at the town's depot.¹³ Lured by free land and dreams of profitable farming, immigrants arrived at the depot with all their worldly possessions packed into a single boxcar. A typical immigrant railroad car would have looked a lot like that unloaded at Lavina by an early settler named Carl Krause. It contained "sixteen chickens, three pigs, three barrels of water, thirty sacks of seed oats, twelve bales of hay, household goods, bed clothes, food, some meat," a cow and heifer and four horses.¹⁴

Homesteaders established schools in the countryside for their children, but commercial centers like Lavina were the focus of the region's social life. The scale of Lavina's 1911 Fourth of July celebration attested to both the importance of town gatherings and to population growth in the surrounding countryside. About 1,000 people turned out that year to witness the parade, baseball game, and other patriotic festivities.¹⁵ The town served the trade as well as the social needs of its rural neighbors. As one resident recalled of Lavina:

...during the 'teens, the big night of the week for all fanners was Saturday, when all business was open until 10p.m., even the post office. We hitched up the horses to the spring-wagon, taking our produce, eggs, etc. to Slayton Mercantile and Tom Linton [sic] store to exchange for food and clothing. The children received a penny or nickel to spend...In summer when the sweetpeas were in bloom the children would trade them for ice-cream cones at Farr's Drug Store. Lavina had a good band [that gave] concerts on Saturday nights outside in the summer.¹⁶

In addition to summer concerts, town diversions included basketball games, men's and women's baseball clubs, a "Negro Minstrels" group, a women's literary club, and various fraternal and civic organizations.¹⁷ After its construction in 1912, the Lavina Opera House, above the garage, hosted a great number of these events, including basketball games.

Lavina's Heyday, Rapid Demise and Modest Renaissance

Despite losing its bid for county seat of the newly formed Musselshell County in 1912, Lavina flourished through the 1910s. Homesteaders grew flax, wheat, rye, and oats and joined the established stock operations in producing sheep and cattle for market. The widespread adoption of steam engines in this period eased farmers' workload and allowed farming on a larger scale.¹⁸ Through it all, the Lavina State Bank served the community as the financial center of the town and region. When drought descended on the region in 1918, those who had settled near streams "started the construction of small diversion dams and canals to divert water to their lands."¹⁹

Adaptation and optimism, together with loans and other financial support from the bank, pulled most of the homesteaders through the first few years of drought, and by 1920 the growth of the area's population created a need for more accessible government. Lavina again lost the contest for county seat, this time to Ryegate, which became the civic center of Golden Valley County. At the time of its formation, Golden Valley County housed 49 school districts and five banks. The abundance suggested by such numbers would not last. While homesteaders, and the services they supported, managed to weather the first years of drought, the climate did not reward their tenacity. The rains failed to come, and the drought lasted

¹³ Stearns 1966, pp. 113-114, 119; Stearns 1966a, pp. 87, 118.

¹⁴ Gordon et al. 1971, p. 170.

¹⁵ Gordon et al. 1971, p. 136.

¹⁶ Gordon et al. 1971, p. 171.

¹⁷ Gordon et al. 1971, p. 138, 167, 171.

¹⁸ Millie Schanz, n.d. "A Glimpse Into the Past," courthouse history file, Ryegate.; Gordon et al. 1971, p. 165.

¹⁹ Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 6-7.

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into the mid-1920s. By January of 1924, all five of the county's banks, including the Lavina State Bank, had failed and settlers fled the dry land in droves.²⁰ The devastation in Golden Valley County mirrored that in the state as a whole. Over half of the state's banks failed, and the influx of immigrants that characterized the 1910s reversed itself as destitute Montanans began a sustained exodus in search of greener pastures. In the 1920s, Montana became the only state in the union to lose population.²¹

When the Lavina State Bank failed in 1923, both Lehfeltdt and Slayton lost their fortunes. They used their own money to refund their customers as best they could. Slayton fared better than Lehfeltdt, as his mercantile and business interests elsewhere in the region sustained him and his family. Lehfeltdt, however, was unable to recover financially. His Adams Hotel closed in 1922, and Lehfeltdt ran a bar out of the Slayton Annex until his death in 1955.

Daniel Slayton served as postmaster for the new town of Lavina, and ran the post office out of his mercantile after 1910. After his tenure, the post office continued in that building until 1923, when the bank failed. At that time, Ralph Rorabeck purchased the bank building and ran the post office from the first story storefront. Wisconsin native Rorabeck was a farmer in the area by 1920, but was postmaster within a few years. He continued to serve in that capacity from the former bank building until 1960, when a new post office was constructed across the street.

The Dust Bowl and Great Depression of the 1930s followed the drought and farm depression of the 1920s, and many producers who had survived the turbulent twenties abandoned their operations in the dirty thirties. Between 1929 and 1934, American agricultural commodity prices fell an average of 40 percent, while industrial prices fell only 15 percent.²² Montana lost over 10 percent of its remaining farms in the 1930s, as agriculturalists facing both drought and poor prices proved unable to pay their expenses. The outcome would have been worse were it not for the infusion of vast amounts of federal aid: only one state received more federal funds than Montana in the 1930s, and at times roughly one in four residents relied on some form of relief.²³ Lavina suffered with the farmers and ranchers that surrounded her, for "the fortunes of people in Golden Valley County [were] most dearly tied to agriculture."²⁴ The town welcomed the return of rain in 1938. Record crop yields combined with booming wartime commodity prices in the early 1940s translated into prosperity for Montana's producers and the commercial centers they supported. Golden Valley County's rural residents once again had money to spend in town, as the net income of Montana ranchers increased 188 percent between 1940 and 1948.²⁵

The national transition to extensive automobile and truck use, effectively completed by about 1940, also reinvigorated Lavina. By 1923, the road connecting Billings and Lavina was a part of the "Buffalo Highway," an officially designated tourist route that ran from Cheyenne, Wyoming to Glacier National Park. It became a part of the Federal Aid Secondary Highway system in 1942, and in 1947 the State Highway Commission contracted for the reconstruction and paving of the dirt and gravel road. Some new buildings accompanied the road improvements, as residents erected two gas stations and a new cafe to serve travelers passing through.²⁶ The return of veterans after the end of the war contributed as well to the modest second building boom. Service men and their families founded Lavina's American Legion Post in 1946, and in

²⁰ Montana State Engineer's Office 1949, p. 8; Anonymous, "Golden Valley County," courthouse history file, Ryegate. n.d.(post 1980), p. 1.

²¹ Malone and Roeder 1976, p. 216- 243.

²² John A. Garraty, *The Great Depression: An Inquiry into the Causes, Course, and Consequences of the World Wide Depression, as Seen by Contemporaries and in the Light of History*, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, San Diego, 1986), p. 54.

²³ Malone and Roeder 1976, p. 227-237.

²⁴ Anonymous n.d, p. 2.

²⁵ Malone and Roeder 1976, p. 230,237; Anonymous n.d, p.2.

²⁶ Axline 2001; Gordon et al. 1971, p. 35, 168.

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1953 the post completed a permanent hall on the west side of Main Street.²⁷ Relative economic stability continued through the end of the 1950s, and manifested itself physically in the construction of several comfortable homes and a new Post Office, completed in 1960.²⁸

Masons in Montana

Most historians concur that Freemasonry, in its current form, probably developed as an adjunct from medieval stonemasons through the ages leading up to the Operative Stone Masons Guilds. Just how or when the transition took place from Operative Guild Free-Stone Masonry to Speculative intellectual Freemasonry (using stonemasons tools, clothing and customs as allegorical aids to teach their precepts) is not clear, although Scottish Lodge Kilwinings records showing non Operatives being admitted by at least 1672 and some Lodges in England were entirely non Operative by the time of Elias Ashmole in 1646.

The earliest known record of a Masonic initiation anywhere is that of John Boswell, Laird of Auchenleck, who was initiated in the Lodge of Edinburgh according to the lodge minutes of 8 June 1600. That lodge was Operative and Boswell appears to be an example of one of the earliest Speculative initiations and adds weight to a case for the Transition Theory of Freemasonry, at least in Scotland.

The earliest records of an initiation in England include Sir Robert Moray in 1641. Abroad, the first native-born American to be made a Mason was probably Jonathan Belcher, in 1704, who was then Governor of Massachusetts.

The popularity of Freemasonry grew with great speed throughout the UK and around the world from 1717 following in the wake of British settlers, merchants and military. In 1731, the first American Grand Lodge obtained its Constitution, The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, making it the first Grand Lodge in the United States of America. Over the next 100 years, Freemasonry attracted many leading lights forming the cream of the intellectual and scientific establishment including Sir Robert Walpole, Robert Burns, Mozart, Darwin, Frederick the Great and from the USA, Franklin and Washington.²⁹

Masonry is an important thread in the history of Montana that began with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The explorers left little tangible evidence, but among features named by the Expedition are three rivers in Madison County. The Wisdom, Philosophy and Philanthropy rivers are named for Masonic ritual. Meriwether Lewis, likely the first Mason to set foot in the region, left this evidence of his Masonic affiliation.

Half a century later in September of 1862, Captain James Fisk's wagon train camped on the western edge of the Rocky Mountains. Nathaniel Langford, George Gere and Richard Charlton - the only Masons in the company - climbed to the summit of Mullan Pass where they opened and closed an informal lodge of Master Masons.

Bedazzled by the grandeur of the mountains in the clear September twilight, there atop the pass, they opened and closed an informal lodge of Masons. Langford wrote: "I have listened to the solemn ritual of Masonry a hundred times, but never when it impressed me so seriously as upon this occasion; and such also was the experience of my companions."³⁰

²⁷ Gordon et al. 1971, p. 139.

²⁸ Golden Valley County Real Property Records, Golden Valley County Clerk, Ryegate, MT.

²⁹ "A Concise History of Freemasonry," <http://www.oelodge.uklinux.net/history/htm>.

³⁰ Ellen Bauml, "Montana Episode: The Masonic Apron of Meriwether Lewis and the Legacy of Masonry in Montana," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Winter 2005, p. 57.

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This meeting of the three Masons, according to Masonic tradition and as an alternative to other theories, is one of three events represented in the vigilante ultimatum “3-7-77” that symbolizes Montana’s turbulent early history and survives today as part of the insignia of the Montana Highway Patrol. The second event was the funeral of William Bell whose death of mountain fever on November 12, 1862, was the first natural death at Bannack. His funeral brought 76 Masons together for the first formal fraternal gathering. Bell himself was the 77th Mason. The third momentous event was the forming of the vigilance committee, or Vigilantes, at Virginia City on December 22, 1863. This came in the wake of the murder trial and conviction of George Ives. The next day 7 men, all reputedly Masons, organized the Vigilantes and adopted the “3-7-77” signature. Not all Vigilantes were Masons and although this theory has been often challenged, Masons undeniably played a very important role in laying the strong foundation upon which the state of Montana rests.

Whether the Vigilante warning originated in Masonry or not, the Masons were of considerable importance to Montana’s first white communities. Masons played a prominent role in Lavina as they had in most of Montana’s frontier. The fraternity embodied in the establishment of a Masonic lodge served to bind the nascent communities together with familiarity and ritual.³¹

As Montana’s economy became more diversified, agricultural and trading centers developed across the state, often along the railroad lines. Indeed, the founding dates of the Masonic Lodges throughout the state are geographic indicators of the state’s development – mining towns such as Virginia City, Philipsburg, and Red Mountain City in the 1860’s, trading centers along transportation routes, such as Bozeman and Missoula in the 1860s and 1870s and the railroad towns – Glendive, Miles City, Billings –in the early 1880s, coinciding with the arrival of the Northern Pacific. Towns filled in through the homestead boom and the arrival of the Milwaukee Road in the early 1900s and 1910s, culminating with the “Hi-Line” towns along the Great Northern in the 1910s.

Lavina’s Masonic Lodge

Lavina Masonic Lodge #107 was initiated in 1916 with Worshipful Master Thomas Smalley, Senior Warden A.O. Englet, and Junior Warden Arleigh Johnston presiding. It appears that the Lodge met for a time above the Linton Store, but for many years in the Opera House at 9-11 Main Street until 1938 when the old bank building was purchased from Mr. Rorabeck. That year, coinciding with the end of the drought and the beginning of a more prosperous era in the history of Lavina, the Masons constructed an addition to the bank building, and providing for additional space, including a hall within the second story, in which to conduct their rites.

From 1938 until 1960, the Lodge convened on the second floor while the U.S.Post Office rented the lower floor. The building was partially re-sided with Masonite in the late 1950s and with vinyl siding in the 1960s. At some time along the way, the front ceiling on the main floor was dropped and acoustical tile installed, and wood floors were covered with linoleum tiles.

Vitality began to return to the Lodge when the Ryegate and Lavina Lodges combined in 1995 to form the Lavina Temple Lodge #101. Membership expanded. Dinners preceded monthly lodge meetings. The Lavina Masonic Lodge’s renaissance is fittingly manifested in the restoration of their building.

³¹ Ellen Bauml, “Montana Episode: The Masonic Apron of Meriwether Lewis and the Legacy of Masonry in Montana,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Winter 2005, p. 58.

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Conclusion

Through the first half of the twentieth century, the building at 101 Main Street in Lavina, Montana, has served as an important hub of community life. During its earliest incarnations as the Bank of Lavina/Lavina State Bank, it served as the financial center of the region, upon which the agricultural community and local commercial development depended. During the early 1920s, banks across the state failed in quick succession, as drought, over speculation, and national depression contributed to financial crisis. The Lavina State Bank is an important local representation of this important era in the state's history. Though it no longer functioned as a bank, the building continued to be an important gathering place and institution in its function as the local post office. When the Masons purchased the building in 1938, and expanded its footprint to accommodate their needs, its dual role as post office and fraternal hall cemented the building's important function in the community development of Lavina. For these reasons, the building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

9. Major Bibliographic References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other -- Specify Repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: **Zone** 12 **Easting** 658853 **Northing** 5128602

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): SE ¼ SW ¼ Section 2, T6N, R22E

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 1, Block 5,. Lavina Original Townsite.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, based on legally recorded boundary lines, to include the land surrounding the building that has been historically associated with the building and conveys the property's historic setting.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Delia Hagen
organization: Historical Research Associates, Inc. date: August 2003
street & number: 125 Bank Street telephone: (406) 721-1958
city or town: Missoula state: MT zip code: 59802

name/title: Francis Rose
organization: Lavina Temple Lodge #101 date: December 2006
street & number: 101 Main Street
city or town: Lavina state: MT zip code: 59046

Property Owner

name/title: Lavina Temple Lodge #101
street & number: 101 Main St.
city or town: Lavina state: MT zip code: 59046

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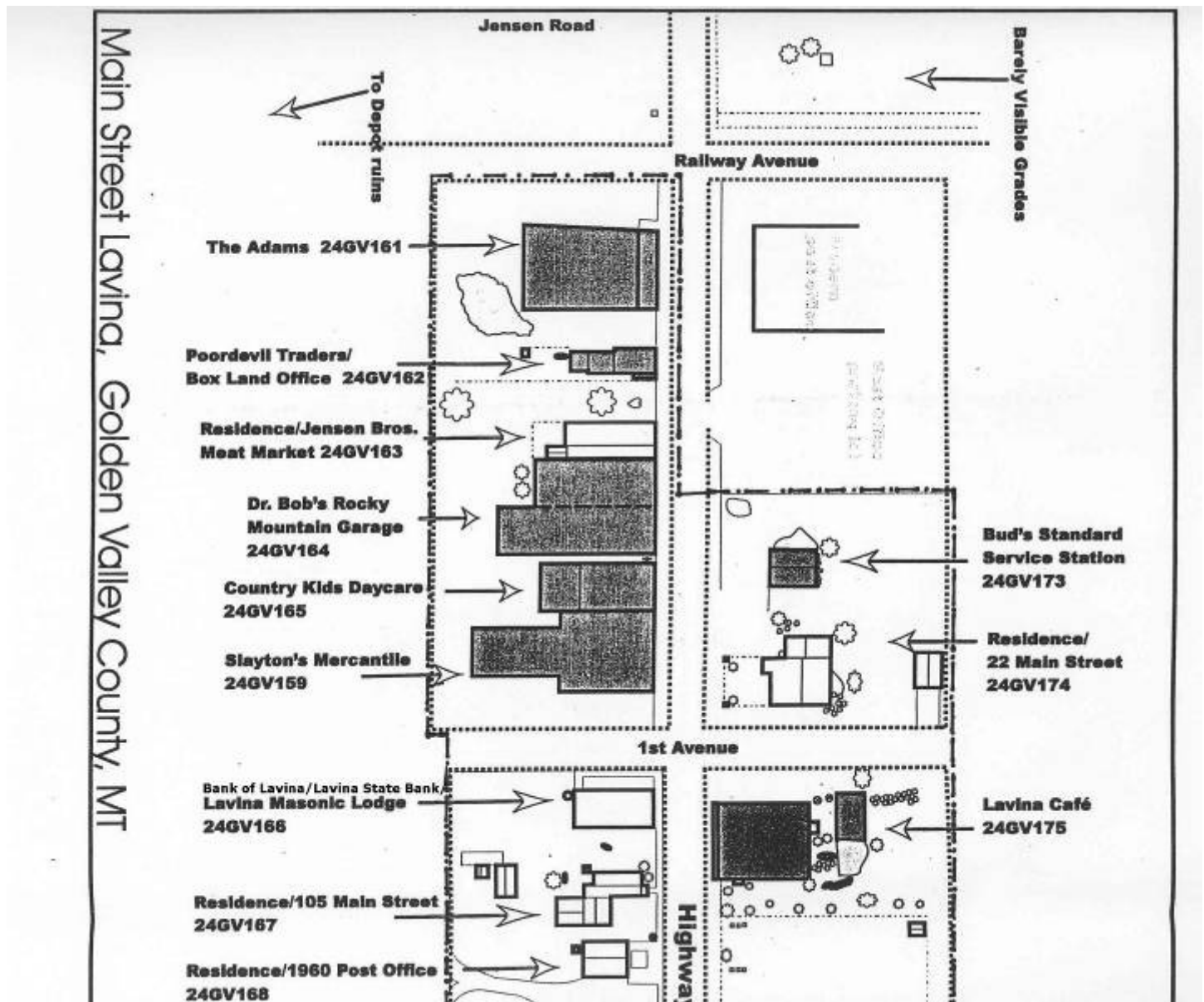
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Map of Lavina's Main Street.

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Cadastral Map detail indicating location of the Lavina State Bank property.

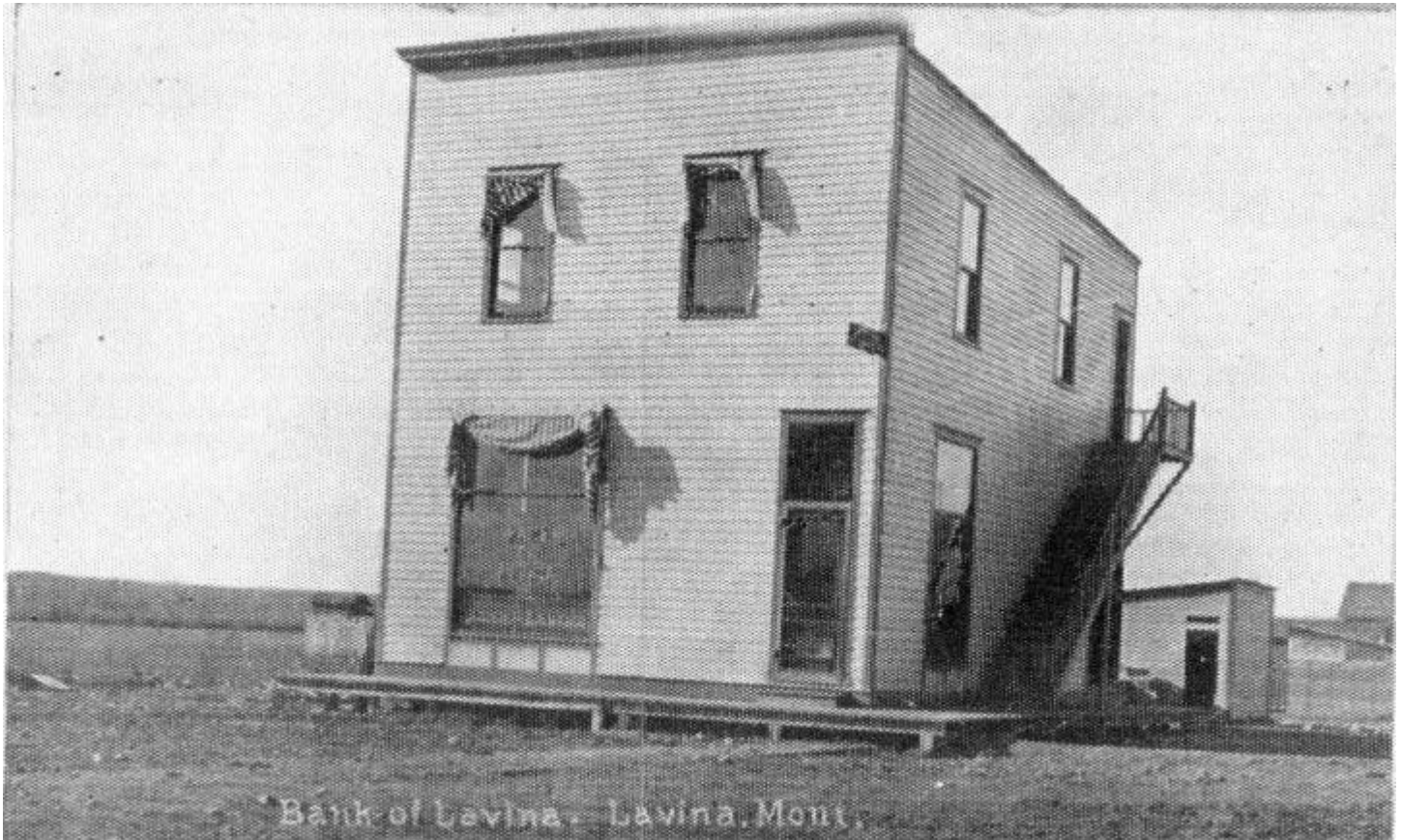
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Bank of Lavina c. 1908.



East elevation 2005.

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Detail of east elevation first story window.



Detail of east elevation entry.

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North elevation 2005



North elevation detail of balcony/incomplete fire escape stair.

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Detail of north elevation.



South elevation 2005.

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South and west elevations, 2005.